

ARIZONA STATE HABITAT PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE

Meeting of February 9, 2013 – 9:00 AM

Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) Headquarters in Phoenix, AZ

Present:

J.W. Harris, AZ Game & Fish Commission, HPC Chair
Amber Munig, AGFD Game Branch
Stephen Williams, Forage Resource Study Group
Joe Currie, AGFD Development Branch
Jake Fousek, AGFD Region 6
Dave Daniels, AGFD Region 6
Lanie Antolik, AGFD Region 3
Brian Wakeling, AGFD Game Branch
Tom Mackin, Williams-Flagstaff HPC
Mike Sumner, AGFD Region 4
Randy Lamb, Prescott HPC
Curt Steinke, Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society
Ben Brochu, AGFD Region 5
Reuben Terán, AGFD, HPC Coordinator, Game Branch

Bob Jacobs, Mule Deer Foundation
Greg Naff, Arizona Elk Society
Annette Naff, Arizona Elk Society
John Millican, Sierra Vista-Douglas HPC
Brad Fulk, AGFD Region 5
Scott Lerich, National Wild Turkey Federation
Bob Vahle
Tom Finley, AGFD Region 3
Hannah Finley
John Tuter, Arizona Elk Society
Terry Herndon, Mule Deer Foundation
Troy Christiansen, AGFD Landowner Program
Tyler Richins, AGFD Region 1

Commissioner Harris welcomed everyone. The attendees introduced themselves and the Commissioner conducted the roll call of representatives from the local HPCs.

Commissioner's Roll Call of Local HPCs

Springerville-Alpine – Tyler Richins
Winslow – No representative
Show Low – No representative
Fredonia – No representative
Williams-Flagstaff – Tom Mackin
Forage Resource Study Group – Stephen Williams
Kingman – Lainie Antolik

Prescott – Randy Lamb
Southwest – Mike Sumner
Tucson – Ben Brochu
Safford – No representative
Sierra Vista-Douglas – Brad Fulk
Payson Natural Resources Committee – Dave Daniels

The Commissioner stated that he would like to see an effort by the Department to re-engage or re-start the local HPCs that are inactive or defunct.

Reuben Terán reviewed the agenda for today's meeting and stated that if time allowed, he would do a quick overview of the Department's new recreational access online tool.

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the State HPC meeting of June 30, 2012. The motion carried and the minutes were approved as written.

Reuben presented the group with the list of all projects that had been approved for funding during the collaborative process between the Department and the Wildlife Conservation Organizations (WCOs) who raise the Special Big

Game License Tag dollars that make up the bulk of funding for HPC projects. Of 80 project proposals submitted, 2 were withdrawn from consideration, and 64 were approved for funding. The final total of Special Tag funding for this year's projects is \$1,489,265, which includes funding for recently proposed project 12-220: #587-Buck Farms #1 House Rock Buffalo Water Catchment, located on the House Rock Wildlife Area project which was not included in the original list of proposals submitted in September 2012 (see below).

The Commissioner asked for a motion for the HPC to approve this list and the motion carried.

House Rock Buffalo Project Proposal:

This project was just recently proposed following discussions at the January 2013 funding coordination meeting with the wildlife conservation organizations regarding special buffalo tag funds that were still unobligated following project proposal funding allocations. There was consensus among the participants that these funds need to be put on the ground for conservation activities and discussions led to possible buffalo projects that could be implemented. Joe Currie of the Development Branch gave an overview of the proposal. The project began with winter range water needs for mule deer, but this one is on the House Rock Wildlife Area (WA). To date 6 of 8 catchments on the west side are done, and of the 3 on the east side, this will be the 3rd of 3. It should be noted that the 2 other catchments were also in the \$90K range to build. The elevated costs, which are higher than typical catchments are due to the specialized materials, including a handmade concrete trough, 3 fiberglass tanks with a total capacity of 18,000 gallons, an extra big apron and enclosure fence. The cost also includes hiring a contractor to build it. It is hoped that it will help keep the bison on the WA and off the National Park. There will be Department oversight on the construction. When asked about the potential for volunteers to work on it, Joe reminded the group that contractors typically do not want volunteers working on project for which the contractor is responsible. There are also plans to do the last 2 catchments on the west side. One will be for bighorn sheep, as well as mule deer, and the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society is interested in funding it. There are no federal habitat funds available for this project and the Kaibab Stamp funds are being used to eradicate cheat grass.

Recreational Access on the Boquillas Ranch – Tom Finley, Region III Supervisor:

Tom Finley gave an overview of the Department's efforts to preserve access on the Big Boquillas Ranch, deeded property owned by the Navajo Nation (NN) and managed by the Cholla Cattle Company. This overview included a briefing on some elements to be included in the draft agreement that may be finalized in the near future. Points made in the presentation:

- The agreement is using a Landowner Compact Concept, which could be a pilot for other landowner agreements as the Department continues efforts to maintain recreational access throughout the state.
- In Region 3, once the Chino Grande Ranch closed last year, most of the neighboring ranches also closed, fearing an overflow of hunters and especially those who continue to exhibit bad behavior. He gave an example of a particularly egregious and confrontational incident. Tom wanted to make a clear distinction between sportsmen and so-called hunters and how they behave. These closures negated a lot of hard work by Wildlife Managers who had worked so hard to secure access in the area.
- The Navajo Nation intended to lock the Big Boquillas this year. But they are willing to enter into a sustainable and fair access agreement.
- Tom gave a brief history of the Big Boquillas since its acquisition by the Navajo Nation. Since 1987, the Department has sought, but never been able to achieve, a formal access agreement with the NN.

- The Big Boquillas is one of the largest ranches in the U.S. in the largest game management unit in Arizona. Its hundreds of thousands of acres take up 50.5 percent of Unit 10.
- Most of the ranch is deeded property, with a few sections of State Trust Land. Although not in the typical checkerboard pattern. Maintenance costs run about \$500K annually, for water developments, pipelines, earthen tanks, fences and 350 miles of roads.
- There are 393 miles of pipeline, 110 steel water storages, 150 steel troughs and 130 huge earthen stock tanks, as well as several hundred miles of fence with 42 access points.
- The Department owns and maintains 5 waters on ranch.
- The Big Boquillas is a business and the excess maintenance costs associated with recreation on the ranch are hurting the business.
- The proposed Recreational Impact Fee will be assessed to offset costs associated with recreational access.
- The Department will continue to manage wildlife on the ranch and wildlife will greatly benefit.
- The Recreational Impact Fee cost is reasonable to constituents. The Department did not write or authorize the fee, but the other options were lock the ranch, or open it with restrictions.
- This is an experiment, and still a draft. If an agreement is completed, the Department is shooting for a 3-year agreement.
- If implemented, the Department will evaluate and, if it doesn't seem to be working, re-assess.
- Where we are now: The Department, the NN and Cholla Cattle all support it. This is being done for sportsmen.

The Commissioner noted that this is a model for the future and if it works, may allow for the reopening of other closed ranches. Other comments expressed and questions answered:

- What about ranches that are already open who will want the same? Tom explained that \$60 isn't unreasonable for access to the Boquillas. This agreement considers all interests, but yes, it's a potential, but worthwhile risk.
- The Department has spent a lot of money (sportsmen's dollars) on the ranch over the years. This is important to quantify, document and present how much money and its value to all parties.
- The Recreational Impact Fee will be charged for all adult hunters and recreationists to the ranch, but will be waived for disabled veterans, and junior hunters with one mentor. The fee will be assessed per hunt. Guide fees will be higher than for individual sportsmen. When paying the fee and receiving the access permit, hunters will also be given a copy of the ranch rules and be required to sign a statement to abide by them. For the first few years, violators will be warned and educated, however in the future, there may be some sort of citation issued, as well as denial of future access.
- Ranch rules include prohibiting blinds, tree stands, hunting over waters, trail cameras, and aerial scouting, as well as the common sense rules regarding littering, vandalism and gates. Hopefully sportsmen will police their own ranks, as it is in their best interest if access is to continue.
- The ranch will only be open during hunting seasons, and closed when the hunts are over. Some of the greatest problems occur from shed collectors.
- Is there a concern about the ripple effect on neighboring ranches if hunters choose not to hunt Boquillas because of the Recreational Impact Fee? Babbitt Ranches are wondering how it will affect them, especially for prairie dog hunting. Future impacts and unintended consequences are all under consideration.

Arizona Game and Fish Department Volunteer Program – Jamie Lyons, Volunteer Program Administrator:

Jamie gave an overview of the AGFD's volunteer program and how it works. Points covered:

- Call Jamie if you have questions and need more information. (623-236-7311)
- Our volunteers are very passionate about our mission. They have skills and resources they want to share.
- The common vision – The North American Model; and a passion for wildlife
- It was suggested that the Department create a bank of volunteers that can cross projects, with maybe a list, and information on talents, skill levels and interests (fence work, cooking, etc.)
- Another suggestion was made that work projects are often about education regarding habitat work that benefits multiple species. Some people don't want to work with hunting organizations. Most organizations aren't good at getting the word out to the general public. Outreach is important to hit the larger groups who are interested in outdoors, who are not necessarily sportsmen, but not anti-hunting.
- It is also important to be able to contact volunteers who live near the location of projects.
- Jamie is working on establishing such a database that will be online and open to volunteer participation. It can include a calendar for volunteer projects. It should be up in a few months.
- The Department's PIO Doug Burt put the Hunting and Angling Heritage Work Group (HAHWG) calendar on the website. Perhaps this would be a good starting point. Reuben will contact Jamie about it.
- It would be good to have one contact person from each group who can contact their membership as volunteer opportunities arise.
- A good tool would be an email blast through Department News. Many companies have volunteer opportunities for their employees. Jamie is currently collaborating with the Salt River Project's volunteer coordinator.
- Tap the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Jamie would like to have a point of contact for the Boy Scouts. It was suggested she call Steve Clark, President of Arizona Elk Society (AES). He is also heavily involved in Boy Scouts and is not present at today's meeting because he's at a Boy Scout event. Annette Naff coordinates with Girl Scouts for AES and after many attempts to engage them, had a successful youth campout with them and left them wanting to continue with other events.
- When using volunteers, groups must give their members a copy of the Department's volunteer policy, register them, and track their volunteer hours. This is very important as volunteer hours are used as match for the Department's federal grants.
- Call Jamie if you need volunteers for your projects.

Using Remote Camera Data to Inform Wildlife Management Decisions – Ben Brochu, Region 5 Wildlife Manager:

Ben gave a presentation on his work in Region 5, installing, maintaining, collecting photos and analyzing data from trail cameras set up in various locations. The very informative presentation included many shots and videos of wildlife traffic and use, especially around waters. The objective of using camera trap data is to answer questions, and begins by asking what questions do we want to answer with this data? The information presented also included:

- The photos capture, not just game animals, but multiple species (snakes, birds, coatis, badgers), as well as weather events.

- There are challenges, mostly vandalism and theft. Installation of signage has helped to reduce this. There are also failures associated with camera malfunctions, such as runaway triggers, weather damage, and operator error. Many site locations are remote and the camera may fill with images quicker than personnel have a chance to retrieve them.
- However they are excellent tools, but require extra storage capacity.

Comments:

- The value of these waters to non-hunted species should be highlighted. It was suggested putting these videos up on the website – this speaks to what Jamie mentioned about “getting the word out.” The only hesitation would be keeping confidential the photo locations of “big buck” areas.
- This would be a good running video at the Department’s Expo.
- The group agreed that this was a great educational tool and very impressive. They are also good for describing wildlife events. For instance, one time a turkey, presumed killed by coyotes, was actually killed by a raptor, and it was just coyotes that cleaned up the remains, as documented by a trail camera.

Updates from Game Branch:

Brian Wakeling gave update on hunt guidelines process. The comment period is open until February 15, 2013. It should be noted that any comments received that would require a Commission rule change, get forwarded to the Department’s Rules unit. The hunt guidelines document is on the website and is about 20 pages long. Comments will be shared with the Commission in March and then the Commission will give direction. This will be followed by more public input in the form of a survey, and a draft document will then be presented at public meetings in June, where more public comment will be included for the final presentation to the Commission in September.

Brian also gave an update on the Department’s current effort regarding license structure simplification. Much of this will require statutory change and has been scheduled by Senator Pierce to be sent to committee this week.

Brian also explained the difference between hunt recommendations and the hunt guidelines.

Local HPC & Nongovernmental Organizations Reports and Success Stories:

Arizona Antelope Foundation - John Millican reported on the Arizona Antelope Foundation’s efforts on translocations. They are also currently working on a coyote control effort in the translocation area. In 2012, in the Sonoita-Elgin area, 14 coyotes were shot and 18 fawns survived. They are currently trapping on 2 ranches (private property) and have trapped 30 coyotes. They are hoping for a successful translocation in 2014. They are conducting a large fencing modification project in April 2013 which, when complete, will open up thousands of acres to facilitate wildlife connectivity. The fence project, as well as the Sacaton burn will result in a huge travel corridor in the Empire Cienega area.

Arizona Elk Society - Greg Naff reported on the AES Youth Camp and their outreach to Girl Scouts. 75 girls had a campout, which was so successful that the council has asked for them to be involved in more opportunities. Wapiti Weekend is so popular that kids must apply on April 1, 2013 for available slots.

Payson Natural Resources Committee (PNRC) and the Mogollon Sporting Association (MSA) - Dave Daniels reported that bighorn sheep are showing up in Hells’ Gate Wilderness. MSA and PNRC paid for the collaring of 3 of them for monitoring and DNA sampling.

Williams-Flagstaff HPC – The HPC completed several water development rebuilds last fall in association with people Arizona Elk Society, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and Mogollon Sporting Association. Volunteers from AES conducted water hauling. The group is working with Region 2 in order to create a plan for scheduling these redevelopments, and incorporating GIS data. With rainfall changing and recent fires, there will be quite a few volunteer opportunities. Earthen tanks were cleaned, but are of little or no use in the absence of precipitation to fill them. Trick tanks and developments will be crucial in the future.

Tucson HPC - Ben Brochu reported that the A-Diamond water project is completed. The Silverbell Peak project, in cooperation with Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society (ADBSS) is ongoing. For the Catalina Mountains bighorn sheep translocation, the project will employ a new fundraising strategy, including sponsorships and private donations. Electronic donations will be handled through the ADBSS website.

National Wild Turkey Federation - John Millican reported that they are capturing 50 birds and will be moving them to Happy Valley and the first translocation to the Arivaipa. Scott Lerich reported that the NWTF's Arizona Youth Camps have been noticed by New Mexico Game and Fish and they would like to do something similar in their state.

Forage Resource Study Group - Stephen Williams reported that the precipitation is way below normal, only 4 inches between November 2011 and the 2012 summer monsoons in 2012. The next monitoring will be in March 2013. The Jacks Canyon project is completed, which was a 30-year old non-functioning development. Pat Browning is Duane Coleman's replacement as manager for the Hopi Three Canyons Ranch. One of their issues is bison from Raymond Ranch Wildlife Area (WA) continuing to stray off the WA to surrounding properties.

Southwest HPC - Mike Sumner reported that the Local HPC is in the midst of reorganization and have been suffering from a lack of participation. They will be joining forces with the Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club. The HPC is a stand-alone non-profit and will be working to raise funds. There are now wild pronghorn on the Kofa National Wildlife Refuge. Water projects will benefit antelope and deer, and also on the Cabeza Prieta Refuge and the Barry Goldwater Range.

Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society - Curt reported that one of their members, Gary Drake is helping Ben Brochure with his camera work, deploying some his own cameras. He noted that the large number of predators documented by the cameras is evidence for anti-predator control groups who claim that all lions are being wiped out. Curt attended the Wild Sheep Foundation's convention and met with them and their president is aware of the needs for the Catalina project and may provide funding if possible. Another issue is with possible relocation of sheep from the Clifton-Morenci area. ADBSS approached the mine about offering assistance.

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) – The Red Mountain Big Game Banquet is February 16, 2013 and the RMEF 29th Annual Elk Camp is February 28-March 3 at the Mirage in Las Vegas.

Other WCO Events: ADBSS banquet - March 9, 2013; AES banquet - March 23, 2013; NWTF Turkey Camp – April 18-20, 2013. Three local NWTF chapter banquets are coming up in the spring and the National Convention is next weekend in Nashville. Mule Deer Foundation's Phoenix Chapter's banquet will take place May 18, 2013.

Other Discussion:

Tom Mackin mentioned the increase in tags in Unit 7E to cooperate with the USFS on aspen regeneration. The Forest may re-open some closed roads so hunters can get into areas where elk are hammering the aspen. They did not have a public comment process on this issue and have been receiving pushback from those who don't want the

roads open. The Forest needs to receive comments in support of opening these roads to hunters. Tom suggested contacting the Arizona Wildlife Federation, Coconino National Forest, Arizona Elk Society or AGFD Region 2 Supervisor Craig McMullen if you need information to help craft a letter. This is relevant to the Peaks Hunt area. Individual letters, rather than form letters get better attention. Commissioner Harris stated that the National Forest's travel management policy is a huge issue for the Commission and they will be challenging USFS. He also reminded everyone that the Tonto NF comment period on travel management is open now.

Reuben announced that he will be soliciting updates and completion reports on active projects. Project proponents should expect to hear from him OR just send in your reports. Project completion reports are a vital part of the program and in the future, funding for new projects may be dependent on receipt of completion reports for past projects.

Regarding local HPCs – please contact Reuben and let him know what's happening and he will provide support. He went round the table and asked for a quick check-in on how the local groups are doing:

- Payson Natural Resources Committee – good
- Forage Resource Study Group - good
- Sierra Vista – Very active; meeting next week. Six of their 6 proposed projects were funded, benefiting pronghorn, turkeys, and deer.
- Tucson, and Williams are both doing well.
- Winslow and Show Low are still active, however a representative was unable to attend today's meeting.
- Safford and Springerville-Alpine are doing well.

Reuben gave a brief demonstration of the Department's website for the recreational access database. The address is azaccessmap.com and there is a link to it from the Landowner Access link on the Department's home page.

Reuben will be posting all Local HPC meeting and funded projects to the HPC web page.

Commissioner Harris reminded everyone to work with volunteers.

Date and location for Summer HPC Meeting: AGFD Region 1 Office in Pinetop on Saturday, July 27, 2013.

The meeting adjourned at 12:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Ruth Gregory